



**Gender Transformation for Africa:** A Sexual, Reproductive and Maternal Health Research Collaborative

**Transformation du genre pour l'Afrique:** Une recherche concertée sur la santé sexuelle, reproductive et maternelle

## Webinar Report

### Knowledge Translation for Gender Transformative Approaches to SRMH

#### Welcome and introduction

- Bernice Gyawu, representing the Ghana GTR Research team, welcomed participants to the Knowledge Translation webinar. She highlighted the critical role of knowledge translation in bridging research, policy, and practice, particularly within gender-transformative approaches to sexual, reproductive, and maternal health.
- Bernice noted that the webinar builds on earlier discussions held in South Africa in September and is intended to reflect on current knowledge translation practices, share lessons learned, and strengthen strategies for achieving greater impact. The session also provides an opportunity to explore collective knowledge translation efforts and contribute to a commentary for GT4Africa. She concluded by providing an overview of the programme and wishing participants a productive and engaging webinar.

<p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a platform for projects to share and reflect on their KT experiences</li> <li>• Enable context-specific discussions on challenges and practical KT approaches</li> <li>• Explore ideas for collective, cohort-wide KT engagement and collaboration</li> <li>• Generate input that can contribute to a GT4Africa commentary on this topic.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Programme</b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td>Welcome and introduction</td></tr> <tr><td>Brief input to set the scene</td></tr> <tr><td>Conversation starters reflecting on the video and their experience</td></tr> <tr><td>Group discussion (see questions on slide)</td></tr> <tr><td>Plenary report back: 3 take away messages</td></tr> <tr><td>Discussion about KT across the cohort</td></tr> <tr><td>Closing, Evaluation and upcoming events</td></tr> </table>	Welcome and introduction	Brief input to set the scene	Conversation starters reflecting on the video and their experience	Group discussion (see questions on slide)	Plenary report back: 3 take away messages	Discussion about KT across the cohort	Closing, Evaluation and upcoming events
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## Brief expert input

- Wolde introduced a video from one of SOPH's partnerships that focuses on translating research into policy and practice. The video features an interview with Professor Purna Sen, a highly experienced expert who has held senior leadership roles within international agencies.



- The video was previously shared during a face-to-face meeting in Cape Town, where it generated rich discussion. The organising team considered it highly relevant to share with the wider cohort as a conversation starter and a prompt for further discussion and reflection. The key messages from the interview are presented below.

## Key Messages

- Change takes a long time – plan for this
- To make change you need research, policy, practice and cultural change all of which requires advocacy
- You need passion and commitment
- Speak the language of those that you are speaking to
  
- Your role as a researcher is to ensure that the data and the voices of the people you are speaking on behalf of is communicated well to people who can create change

## Conversation starter: Panel

- To kick off the group discussion, three cohort members (Nathalie from Burkina Faso, Vuyo from South Africa, and Abigiel from Ghana), were invited to share brief reflections on the video and their own experiences around knowledge translation within their respective contexts to draw on diverse perspectives from the cohort.

- Vuyo reflected on key takeaways from the video and shared insights from his team's knowledge translation work. He emphasised To initiate the group discussion, three cohort members, Nathalie from Burkina Faso, Vuyo from South Africa, and Abigail from Ghana, were invited to share brief reflections on the video and on their experiences with knowledge translation within their respective contexts. This approach was intended to draw on the diversity of perspectives across the cohort.
- Vuyo reflected on key messages from the video and shared insights from his team's knowledge translation work. He emphasized that meaningful change requires time and sustained motivation. His team has embedded knowledge translation strategies within long term programmes that are positioned to adopt and apply research findings. He also highlighted the challenges of balancing multiple roles as researchers, advocates, and activists, particularly in emotionally and intellectually demanding contexts where resistance or pushback may occur. To address these challenges, the team conducts regular debriefing sessions to reflect on their work and its personal and professional impacts.
- Vuyo further emphasized the importance of strategic communication, noting the need to tailor messages to resonate with both communities and policymakers. His team undertakes stakeholder mapping to align messaging with stakeholders' priorities, although translating engagement into concrete action remains a challenge. He stressed the value of amplifying community voices and grounding messages in clearly articulated problems to influence policy processes. Overall, he underscored the importance of balancing advocacy with effective communication, strategic planning, and a long term commitment to sustainability.

### **Madam Abigail, Ghana Health Services**

- Abigail, representing the Ghana Health Service, emphasised the central role of stakeholder engagement and community participation in the successful implementation of health initiatives. She noted that past projects implemented without meaningful community involvement often failed, underscoring the importance of ensuring that interventions are relevant, accepted, and responsive to local contexts.
- The Ghana Health Service prioritises the engagement of key stakeholders from the outset of projects and conducts regular follow-up with communities during implementation to assess progress and impact. Abigail shared an example of a gender-focused family reproductive health initiative in which community members actively requested replication of the project, illustrating how participatory approaches foster ownership, sustainability, and community support.
- She concluded by stressing that meaningful and sustained change requires the active involvement, access to information, and participation of those most affected. This inclusive approach has contributed to improved outcomes and stronger partnerships within Ghana's public health initiatives.

### **Group discussion**

### Guiding questions

- **In your experience, what do you think has been most important in ensuring your evidence facilitates change for gender equality and SRMH?**
  - How is this different from your usual approach to KT?
    - What key risks must we consider when advocating for change, particularly given current political realities?
    - Are there acceptable compromises? What does being pragmatic mean?
  - What are the ethical implications in KT given the power relations among stakeholders working on these issues?
    - How do you operationalise “do no harm” principles?

- Bernice Gyawu shared insights from her team’s use of Theatre for Development as a participatory approach to address issues in adolescent sexual and reproductive health. Their situational analysis identified several key challenges, including power imbalances between adolescents and service providers, cultural sensitivities, and the exclusion of young people from policymaking processes that directly affect them.
- Theatre for Development was selected because it provides a non-confrontational, inclusive, and culturally sensitive method for engaging both adolescents and other stakeholders in discussions on sex education, teenage pregnancy, and contraceptive use. The approach supports dismantling power hierarchies and encourages broad participation, resulting in strong stakeholder buy-in.
- Bernice also discussed the complexities of working with educational institutions in Ghana, particularly resistance to sexual and reproductive health topics. This resistance is often linked to concerns about comprehensive sexuality education or perceptions of foreign agendas, including LGBTQ+ rights. Addressing these challenges has required careful relationship-building and strategic language adaptation, such as emphasising reproductive health rather than sexual health, to ensure acceptability while maintaining the integrity of the research objectives.

### Report Back

Tanya invited the rapporteurs to present three key messages emerging from the breakout group discussions.

#### **Michelle Mbutia, APHRC**

- Participants emphasised the importance of conducting an initial assessment to identify potential negative attitudes, cultural sensitivities, stereotypes, and biases that may affect research processes and outcomes. This was considered particularly critical in sensitive research areas, where backlash from various stakeholder groups is common.
- The discussions also highlighted the value of comprehensive stakeholder mapping and context-appropriate engagement strategies. Participants noted the importance of tailoring engagement and messaging to align with the priorities of different stakeholder groups, while remaining flexible and responsive to emerging challenges. For example, when engaging government actors or international funders, emphasising budgetary

implications may be effective, whereas community-level engagement may benefit from highlighting the role of educated girls and youth.

- An example was shared in which media misrepresentation of research findings led to public backlash. In response, the research team developed a targeted media engagement strategy to improve reporting accuracy, demonstrating how challenges can be addressed through proactive communication.

### **Gabriel Ananya, Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana**

- Gabriel underscored the need to recognize the multi dimensional nature of change. While change is often understood as a long term process, participants noted that short term and incremental changes are also significant and should be intentionally identified and pursued alongside broader, long term objectives.
- The discussion further emphasized the importance of strategic partnerships, particularly with individuals who have access to or influence within power structures. Such partnerships were viewed as critical for facilitating engagement with key decision makers and enhancing the reach and impact of dissemination efforts.
- Participants also raised concerns about the potential risks associated with research and advocacy activities. These risks may affect researchers, stakeholders, and broader change processes, especially when working within politically sensitive contexts or engaging with conservative groups on issues such as sexual and reproductive health.
- Ethical considerations were highlighted as central to knowledge translation and dissemination. Participants stressed the importance of validating data prior to publication to avoid misrepresentation of participant perspectives. Additionally, conducting thorough risk assessments before public dissemination was identified as essential, particularly in high risk contexts. An example was shared involving research on LGBTQ plus issues, where careful decisions about what information could be shared were necessary to protect both researchers and participants.

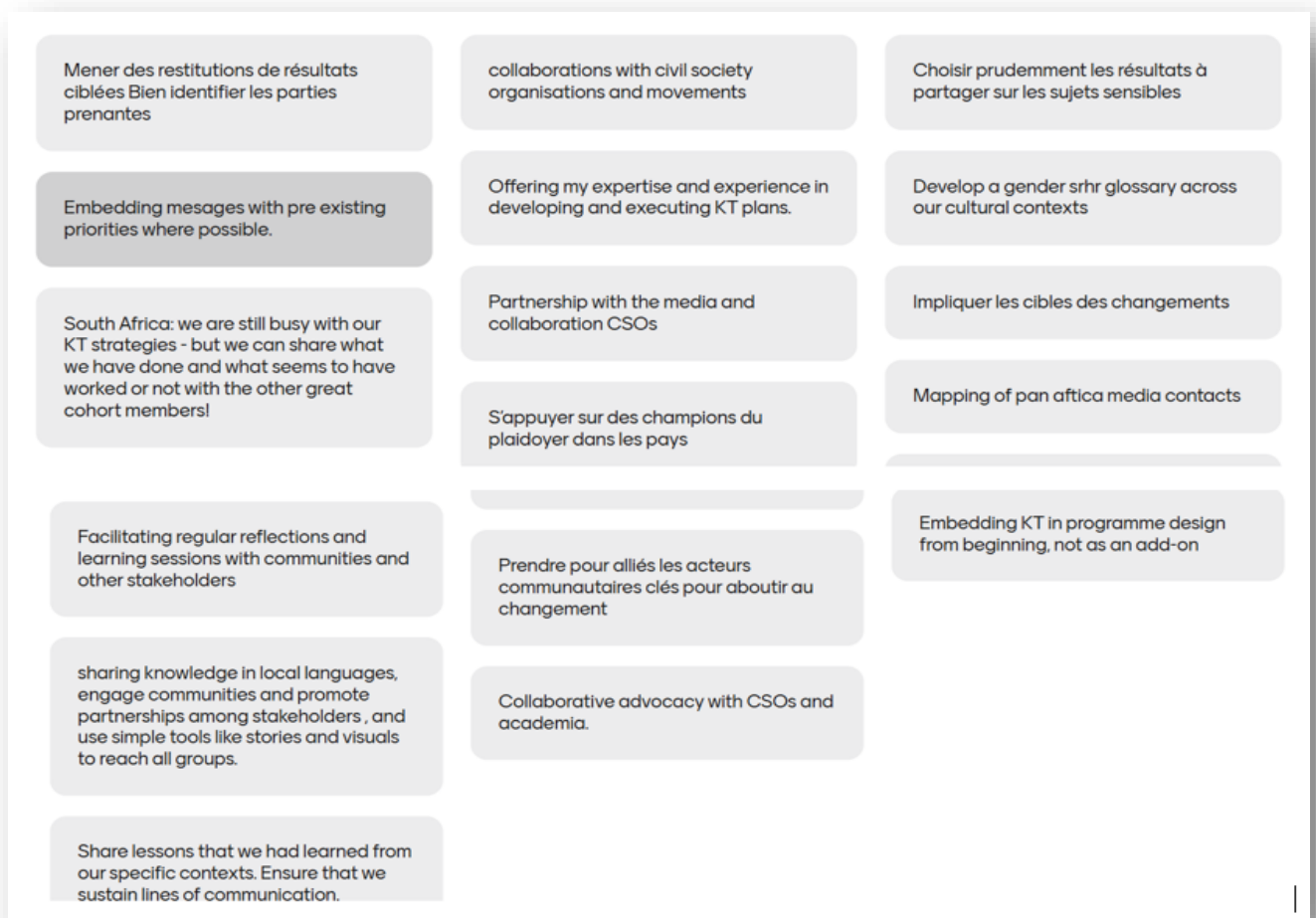
### **Discussions on Cohort Wide Knowledge Translation from the Face to Face Meeting, Cape Town, September 2024**

- Wolde reflected on the ongoing discussions on knowledge translation that originated during earlier face-to-face meetings and steering committee sessions. He emphasised the importance of identifying and recognising key institutions and platforms across the African continent that play a critical role in advancing knowledge translation efforts. These include:

- Key actors shaping health research and practice across Africa
- Key contacts and entry points
- African Academies of Science
- Africa CDC / CPHIA?
- AfHEA
- WANEL
- HSG Africa
- Network of African Schools of Women and Gender Studies
- SRHM, Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters Journal Africa editors
- APHRC/ AFIDEP knowledge translation efforts
- African Community of Practice on Gender and Health/ SOPH & UNU
- African Schools of Public Health Association
  - Wolde is our contact
  - Annual conference
  - Various working groups

### **Proposed ideas and strategies for operationalising knowledge translation for gender transformative SRMH across the collective**

- The session focused on gathering participants' input on potential knowledge translation (KT) strategies that could be applied across the cohort. Participants were encouraged to share their ideas, strategies, and suggestions of individuals who could help implement these approaches. The following reflects their input, including responses shared via Mentimeter.



## Reflections and Discussion

- Asha reflected on key lessons from the discussion, particularly the importance of understanding indicators of change, supporting champions and advocacy campaigns, and identifying key stakeholders and messages. She emphasized these as valuable, cross-cutting principles for knowledge translation. Asha encouraged thinking about collaborative actions across the cohort, such as creating a shared glossary that bridges cultural contexts, and invited ideas for meaningful cross-country initiatives grounded in cohort members' experiences.
- Bernice recalled earlier discussions in South Africa on KT approaches across countries. A key takeaway was the central importance of stakeholder engagement, while recognizing that approaches vary significantly by context. In Ghana and other countries, early engagement with key stakeholders is viewed as especially beneficial. Bernice emphasized the need for context-specific approaches and suggested creating spaces to share diverse country experiences across the cohort.
- Sundari Ravindran elaborated on the importance of tailoring engagement strategies based on the marginalized group involved and their prior experiences with authority. She noted that it is often essential to engage communities first, ensuring they feel heard and included, before approaching those in positions of power. She also highlighted the value of collaborating with feminist movements and forming a cross-sector community

of practice, beyond the health sector alone, to strengthen KT efforts from a gender and equity perspective.

### **Next Steps and Follow-Up**

- Asha George acknowledged the richness of the discussion and noted that additional time would have allowed for deeper exploration of the nuances across contexts. While there had been strong engagement during the face-to-face meeting, she emphasized the importance of extending these conversations across the full cohort. She proposed following up with a joint commentary that could highlight examples from across the cohort and reflect more deeply on shared experiences. Further ideas would be pursued through the steering committee and incorporated into reporting on the Mentimeter inputs.
- Wolde provided updates on upcoming activities. He noted that the journal supplement, including six papers, an editorial, and a scoping review, is nearing completion, with most submissions already made and the final paper forthcoming. A launch event is being considered for May or early June, depending on the journal's production timeline.
- He also shared updates on efforts to sustain a broader network on gender and health in Africa beyond the current collaboration. Approximately 38 colleagues have submitted profiles expressing interest in connecting around teaching, research, and other collaborations, with further updates to follow.
- Additionally, a final cohort member survey is planned for July to assess collaboration, collective work, and engagement across approximately 10–12 webinars and other activities. A closure webinar is anticipated for August. Wolde also highlighted upcoming conferences, such as the Canadian Conference for Global Health and the Conference on Adolescent Health in Jamaica, and invited cohort members to share information about relevant events, as there may be opportunities for IDRC-supported cohort meetings alongside these conferences.
- He concluded by sharing a webinar evaluation link and encouraged participants to provide feedback on their experience and suggestions for future sessions.

### **Closing Remarks**

- Nkoli Ezumah thanked all participants for their engagement and contributions, noting that the session had been highly enriching. She encouraged everyone to complete and submit the evaluation form.
- Asha George also expressed appreciation to participants and facilitators, acknowledging the challenges of virtual engagement amid competing demands. She emphasized the value of sharing resources more broadly and engaging a wider group. She noted that the supplement is nearly complete and highlighted upcoming cross-cutting outputs that will involve further collaboration. She closed by wishing everyone well and expressing optimism about staying connected.